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Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 7 July 1997, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. HENZE (Germany)
(Vice-President)

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In the absence of Mr. Galuska (Czech Republic), Mr. Henze (Germany), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION:

(b) FOLLOW-UP TO POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (agenda item 3 (b)) (continued) (E/1997/65 and Add.1-4, and 89)

Ms. DURRANT (Jamaica) said that capacity-building priorities must not be narrowly-focused or restrictive and must take into account the specificities of individual countries. None of the issues identified in the Secretary-General's report on the subject (E/1997/65/Add.3) were new, nor were they all germane to every country. Paragraph 51 of the report stated that much of the capacity-building work of the United Nations system was United Nations-centred, mandate-driven, event-tenured and tailored to conform to the procedures and requirements of the concerned organizations. That situation must be changed and capacity-building made a country-driven process.

Capacity-building should include not only policy formation, but also institutional and human resource development. In Jamaica, over 75 per cent of all projects funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) were managed locally. An Agenda for Development emphasized the importance of national ownership of programmes. The Country Strategy Note (CSN) could provide a conceptual and strategic framework for operational activities and facilitate efficient programming and delivery of assistance at the regional level. However, it must be based on a national development plan or similar priority-setting document. She suggested that the Secretariat should prepare a report, to be submitted at the forthcoming triennial policy review, on the experience of countries which had successfully adopted CSNs.

Lastly, the Council should be provided with information on past experience at the regional and subregional levels before pursuing the possibility of a regional strategy note (E/1997/65, para. 76).

Mr. ALOM (Bangladesh) said that capacity-building must include a national education system and should emphasize accountability, responsibility, simplified reporting and an integrated approach to system development. A common manual for national education guidelines should replace the various manuals currently in use by different United Nations agencies. Joint training programmes should also be developed.

Development initiatives must be built from the bottom up and must include the participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), women entrepreneurs, indigenous people, the informal sector and local communities. Sustainable human development required capacity-building at the level of Governments and of civil society, and technical cooperation must focus on the extension of national capacities.

A system of information-sharing must be developed at an early stage of programming rather than ex post facto (E/1997/65/Add.2, para. 17), thereby improving coordination and cohesiveness among the various bodies and avoiding duplication and overlapping, and integrated programmes should be increasingly sector-based rather than agency-led.

With regard to shared and collaborative programming, he wondered whether the proposed common programme and programme-resource framework (E/1997/65/Add.2, para. 23) was another name for the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF); if so, he would prefer that a single title were used for that mechanism. He had received no reply to his delegation's earlier request for clarification of the DAF and the CSN.

National authorities should take the lead in implementing any development framework since they, not the United Nations, were primarily responsible for the technical expertise and funding of such programmes. Governments were best able to determine the needs of their own national sectors and should be involved in the preparation of any development assistance or programme-resource framework.

With regard to the General Assembly's request that the specialized agencies should make efforts to achieve common premises (General Assembly resolution 50/120 (1994), para. 44; E/1997/65/Add.2, para. 39), he noted that countries were not, in fact, on an equal footing and that the question of common premises must take into consideration the specific circumstances and situation of each of the countries concerned.

With respect to regional and subregional development cooperation, he emphasized the need to involve national Governments and institutions at the programming and implementation stages, even though the programmes themselves were implemented by the regional institutions. He questioned the usefulness of the subregional country strategy notes proposed by the Secretariat at the previous meeting, since resources were programmed at the regional, not the

subregional, level. It would be better to establish a forum for discussion between national representatives and their development partners at the subregional level, similar to that which already existed at the regional level.

Lastly, his delegation was committed to the programme approach as a means of achieving better integration of the United Nations system but emphasized that it must be implemented flexibly and take into account the individual needs of countries.

Ms. ASHIPALA-MUSAVYI (Observer for Namibia) said that her delegation attached great importance to the operational activities of the United Nations because of their complementarity to her country's development activities. The availability of resources was essential for the elimination of poverty, and strengthening the capacities of communities was the key to their empowerment. The agencies' dwindling resource base made it impossible for them to complement effectively the needs of developing countries. Her delegation agreed with the Secretary-General that there was a need to expand the traditional donor base. The issue of "graduation" from recipient to donor status (E/1997/65, para. 23) was an important one, which her delegation would pursue at the 1998 comprehensive review.

In addition to the criteria mentioned in paragraph 39 of the report (E/1997/65), the success of the resident coordinator system also depended on the capacity, openness and willingness displayed by the head of the system. The selection procedure for resident coordinators was therefore of great importance, and recipient countries were best able to judge its effectiveness.

While she welcomed United Nations reforms aimed at enhancing support for developing countries, they should strengthen the agencies at the field level, and the resulting savings should be channelled towards operational activities.

With regard to regional and subregional cooperation, the capacities of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) must be strengthened if there was to be any meaningful follow-up to the major world conferences. Consideration should be given to the diversities of the various developing regions. Lastly, she doubted the viability of the proposed regional strategy note since there were many countries which did not yet have CSNs.

Mr. EGHLIM (Observer for the Islamic Republic of Iran) said there should be opportunities for intergovernmental discussion of the views and

ideas put forward in the Secretary-General's report (E/1997/65 and Add.1-4). The resident coordinator's primary responsibility for enhancing the coordination and coherence of United Nations development activities at the field level should not affect the independence of the respective funds and programmes. Common premises could contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of operational activities and reduce administrative costs but must not place a financial burden on the host countries. The activities of international organizations, particularly the United Nations funds and programmes, should contribute to capacity-building in developing countries. In that regard, the activities of the resident coordinator should be evaluated on a regular basis.

Mr. IBRAHIM (Malaysia) said that, while his delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's report on progress in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120 (E/1997/65), it would have preferred that the report included a more explicit statement of the problems related to resources, field- and regional-level coordination and capacity-building (E/1997/65/Add.1-3). Problems must be articulated coherently if they were to be solved.

He asked a number of questions related to the success of operational activities. Where were the resources coming from? Was the system receiving enough of them? What were the prospects for additional funds? Were resources being put to the best possible use? Were procedures in place to ensure the effective implementation of programmes? Did field operatives have the necessary management expertise?

There had been little discussion of the need to mobilize resources from the private sector. He welcomed the fact that the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) had begun building bridges to private funding sources.

Governments must take the lead in identifying areas for capacity-building. National ownership of capacity-building programmes was of the utmost importance.

He welcomed the decision in General Assembly resolution 50/120 (1994) (para. 18) that the CSN should include an indication of the level of resources needed. It was important for the CSN, which gave a focus to relations between national Governments and the United Nations system, to be adopted as widely

and quickly as possible. It was unfortunate that some of the specialized agencies did not recognize the relevance of the CSN, thereby complicating the task of the resident coordinators and the host Governments. That issue should be addressed. Furthermore, the proposed regional strategy note would be impossible without a pre-existing CSN.

Mr. ACEMAH (Uganda) said he welcomed the Secretary-General's reform proposals, which should not be viewed merely as a cost-cutting exercise. Improved programme delivery would make the United Nations system more effective.

Country-level coordination was in the interests of all the partners, since it ensured optimal resource utilization and a reduction of duplication. It was thus important to strengthen the resident coordinator system.

National execution was an important means of promoting sustainable indigenous capacity-building. His delegation supported recommendation 1 (E/1997/65) since a strengthening of capacities in the developing countries was a prerequisite for eradicating poverty and achieving rapid economic growth and political stability.

His delegation also supported recommendation 16 on the testing of the concept of a regional strategy note. It hoped that donors would provide additional resources for regular evaluation of the impact of operational activities for development.

Ms. KUNADI (India) said that there had been considerable efforts in recent years to improve the efficiency of the United Nations agencies by streamlining operations, increasing transparency and cutting administrative and other costs. Greater efforts had also been made to use common premises and information services. At the field level, coordination between agencies had been significantly improved, and increased dialogue had ensured that the concerns of traditional donors were reflected.

As part of the reform process, resources must be increased to meet the growing needs of developing countries and to ensure the effectiveness of operational activities. The decline in core funding must be addressed, especially in terms of the decrease in official development assistance (ODA). Although contributions to both core and non-core funds were essentially being made by a small number of countries, it should not be forgotten that many developing countries were making significant contributions to administrative and other costs at the field level.

The generation of political will to honour commitments must be a priority; the developing countries should not have to shoulder the entire burden of development themselves. While South-South cooperation and technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC) were important, the effectiveness of United Nations operations depended upon enhanced, predictable funding that took into account such criteria as per capita income, population, the extent of poverty and the effectiveness of aid utilization. Mechanisms such as the annual pledging conference must be carefully examined with a view to improving their ability to mobilize resources.

Development needed to be pursued in its own right, since it was a prerequisite for peace and security. The sovereign right of countries to exploit their own resources must, however, be respected.

Doubts had been expressed about the sustainability of some capacities built through technical cooperation and about the possible negative effects of some activities on long-term capacity-building and even aggravated dependency. The Secretary-General (E/1997/65) had noted that too much emphasis was being laid on immediate economic outputs and too little on policy framework and social, cultural and environmental questions. Capacity-building and immediate economic outputs were not mutually exclusive issues. Indeed, capacity-building divorced from economic gain was of little use. Capacity-building must also be country-driven, situation-specific, and based on a partnership approach. It was best undertaken for well-defined development issues with a programmatic approach.

As recognized in General Assembly resolution 50/120, capacity-building, though important, must not be the sole aim of operational activities. It should be linked to enhancing national execution and reducing dependence on external inputs. Although long-term development of capacities was important, an emphasis on short-term projects was helpful in ensuring evaluation and accountability. While civil society should be closely involved at every level, the United Nations development system needed above all to interact with Governments, which were the repositories of public trust and the representatives of civil society.

Regional strategy notes risked detracting from the country-driven nature of operations. More detailed intergovernmental dialogue was a prerequisite for decisions on mandate funding and on the distinctive identities of the

operational agencies, especially regarding fund-raising activities in a joint framework. Coordination of external assistance at the country level should, however, remain the prerogative of sovereign Governments.

Ms. SHAM POO (Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that the UNDAF was still in its initial pilot stage. It was intended to enhance the efficiency of United Nations development resources at the country level by providing a programmatic umbrella for coordinating the planning of funds and programmes which would involve Governments, NGOs and local communities.

Replying to a question by the observer for Norway, she said that one of the aims of UNDAF was to help streamline the preparatory process of individual funds by making use of accumulated experience from other programmes. There were currently UNDAFs relating to 11 country programmes at different stages of development and 9 more would be added in the coming year. At the country level, each head of programme would continue to submit country-support programmes to the governing body concerned, so as to ensure the accountability of each agency. The resident coordinator would coordinate the reports of the different teams. To strengthen the UNDAF process, the submission of country programmes needed to be synchronized.

She informed the observer for Switzerland that Ghana's experience had already been put into writing and that the report had been submitted to various executive boards.

Replying to the observer for Swaziland, she said that UNICEF had been working on child rights issues, including child labour, commercial sexual exploitation, landmines, children in conflicts, the impacts of sanctions on children and specific situations.

Mr. HAEMMERLI (Chief, Operational Activities for Development Unit, Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development) said he could assure the representative of Jamaica that a comprehensive evaluation of the various agencies' experience of CSNs would be made in the next triennial policy review.

He informed the representative of Bangladesh that the Unit was currently drafting common guidelines for national execution. Those guidelines emphasized the need to abide by CSNs while taking regional considerations into

account. UNDAF would be consulting closely with Governments regarding the question of resources. Attempts would also be made to simplify the instruments.

Regarding subregional strategy notes, the aim was to achieve a close country-level link. A representative subregion would be chosen for the purposes of highlighting the linkages between programmes, CSNs and the "inter-country" dimension. While it was a thorny issue, the Unit was convinced of the advantages of regional activities and the importance of introducing mechanisms such as meetings of a number of resident coordinators.

The representative of Malaysia was correct in emphasizing the importance of stating problems in a straightforward manner. The interim report would be supplemented by more detailed analyses the following year. The resident coordinator issue was currently a subject of intense debate at a senior level.

The meeting rose at 4.10 p.m.